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UNCLAS KATHMANDU 000638

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SUBJECT: NEPAL: MAOISTS TURN OVER 37 HOSTAGES TO ICRC

REF: KATHMANDU 0516

1. (SBU) Pascal Mauchle, Head Delegate for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), confirmed that Maoist insurgents handed over 37 hostages, abducted during the March 20 attack on Myagdi District headquarters (Reftel), to ICRC on April 6. The hostages included the Chief District Officer (CDO), 33 policemen, including the District Superintendent, 2 soldiers, and 1 civilian employed by the police. Mauchle said the hostages, who had been taken by the Maoists to Rolpa District, appeared to be in good health and indicated that they had been not been mistreated.

2. (SBU) Mauchle said the Maoists contacted the ICRC about one week after the Myagdi attack and indicated a desire to surrender the hostages to the organization. Mauchle himself traveled to Rolpa to help coordinate the release. Upon return to Kathmandu on April 6, ICRC released the hostages to a Home Ministry official.

3. (SBU) Comment: This release marks the second time the Maoists have turned over Government hostages to the ICRC in the eight-year conflict. The care and feeding of 37 abductees likely posed a considerable strain on their captors' straitened finances and mobile lifestyle. This logistical burden and the criticism the Maoists drew from international human rights NGOs like Amnesty International for the abductions, rather than any humanitarian impulse, probably prompted the decision to set the hostages free. Nonetheless, their release is welcome news in the otherwise disheartening scenario of the last few weeks.

MALINOWSKI